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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: May 08, 2007

Minister Believes Eurofighter Will Fail Major Test

[¶1.](#) Austrian Defense Minister Norbert Darabos from the Social Democrats says he is convinced that the Eurofighter interceptors for the Austrian armed forces will fail a major quality control test, which will be carried out by Defense Ministry officials next week. Although he did not go into detail, the Minister stressed his assessment applied to both the software releases and the quality of the product. Darabos also described as "juvenile" the ongoing quarrel between Eurofighter producer EADS and the Austrian government over Austria's push to cancel the purchase deal. ORF online news reports that Defense Minister Norbert Darabos caused quite a stir on Monday with his statement before the parliamentary investigative committee, which is looking into the Eurofighter deal that in his opinion the interceptor will fail a major Defense Ministry test regarding the required releases and the quality of the jets. This could mean that the first jets will not arrive in Austria in late May, the Minister said - a statement that was "met with surprise" from the OeVP and the BZÖ, according to ORF online news. Darabos also admitted the dispute between Austria and EADS had reached a "somewhat juvenile level," where neither side is willing to take the first step towards reconciliation. Meanwhile, mass-circulation tabloid *Oesterreich* speculates that the disagreement between the OeVP, under whose government the jets were ordered initially, and the Social Democrat Defense Minister, who has said he is pushing for a cancellation of the deal, could seriously threaten the SPOe-OeVP coalition government.

Truck Tolls to Rise on July 1st

[¶2.](#) Toll charges for heavy trucks on Austrian roads are to be raised by 4.2 cents per kilometer as of July 1st, in agreement with EU authorities. The deal for the increase was announced on Monday by Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and Transport Minister Werner Faymann (SPOe).

Reporting on the upcoming increase in toll charges for heavy trucks on Austrian roads, semi-official daily *Wiener Zeitung* reports that the EU Commission had originally resisted a 4-cents-per-kilometer rise, quoting uniform road pricing guidelines throughout the EU. The rise will bring Asfinag, the company managing Austrian roads, an extra 115 million Euros per year. Liberal daily *Der Standard* in a front-page report quotes Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer as emphasizing that Brussels had accepted the toll increase in the end. The breakthrough on the issue came after difficult and drawn out negotiations, and was achieved as a result of "Austria having presented a united front in the matter, and because of the ongoing climate protection debate," Gusenbauer said. Mass-circulation tabloid *Kronen Zeitung* quotes Transport Minister Werner Faymann as saying that the higher toll will hopefully reduce the huge numbers of trucks passing through Austria.

Political Leaders Welcome Sarkozy's Victory

[¶3.](#) Austrian President Heinz Fischer has joined leaders from around the world in congratulating France's President-elect Nicolas Sarkozy on his election victory. Meanwhile, Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer of the Social Democrats said he hoped for new dynamism in the EU because of Sarkozy's victory, while Vice-Chancellor Wilhelm Molterer, the head of the People's Party, said Sarkozy's decisive victory was a basis to overcome the major challenges facing France's next leader.

Like many political leaders from around the world, Austrian President Heinz Fischer, Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer and Vice-Chancellor Wilhelm Molterer have congratulated Nicolas Sarkozy on his victory in the French presidential elections last Sunday. Fischer said Austrian-French relations had a long history and that the two countries shared an interest in closer EU integration, semi-official daily *Wiener Zeitung* writes. Independent provincial daily *Salzburger Nachrichten* quotes Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, who stressed the vote was not only a very important one for France, but for all of Europe. France's position remains highly significant for the future of the European integration process and for Europe's role in the world: "Sarkozy's election paved the way for France to address decisive issues with a new dynamism, including, first and foremost of all, the EU Constitution, the Western Balkans, as well as issues such as growth and employment," Plassnik emphasized. She considers it a positive signal that Sarkozy is pushing for quick agreement on the matter, the daily quotes the Foreign Minister.

France Preparing for New Era

[¶4.](#) France is preparing to enter a new political era, one day after choosing Conservative UMP candidate Nicolas Sarkozy to be the

country's next President. Sarkozy has pledged to boost the economy by creating jobs, to liberalize employment laws, be tough on crime and control immigration. On Monday, the President-elect revealed that his choice of Prime Minister will be François Fillon, currently his senior political adviser. Sarkozy is also expected to quickly name a new cabinet for the start of his five-year term in office. The first key hurdle for the new President, who officially takes over from Jacques Chirac on May 16, will be the nationwide parliamentary elections in June. Meanwhile, police clashed with protesters in Paris and some other cities for a second night in a row after Sunday's run-off vote.

All Austrian media continue to report on the French presidential elections. According to centrist daily *Die Presse*, President-elect Nicolas Sarkozy can be expected to push both a conservative as well as pragmatic agenda. One of the cornerstones of his policy will likely be a radical reform of France's job market, adds the daily. The *Presse* does not believe that Sarkozy's victory will necessarily bring about a strengthening of the Conservative agenda all over Europe, nor kick off new right-wing trends in the EU. Liberal daily *Der Standard* meanwhile says the EU institutions appear to be pleased with the outcome of the French election, and consider Sarkozy the "lesser evil" compared to Ségolène Royal. His pragmatic approach could help solve the EU's constitution crisis. The daily's foreign affairs writer Christoph Winder in an analysis says that Sarkozy's opponents tried to paint him as "incorrigibly pro-US," and as someone who would "unquestioningly submit to Washington. A premature diagnosis," according to Winder, who does not think Sarkozy will turn out to be a "French George Bush," as some have already predicted. It would be "better to wait for the new French President's first signals indicating which political course he intends to follow regarding the US; given the significance of the French-US relations, they can be expected soon enough," Winder believes. In contrast, another foreign affairs writer for the *Standard*, Thomas Mayer, harshly criticized Sarkozy: "It is hard to believe how many people actually assume that a former Minister of the Interior, who acted as a right-wing populist and tough law-and-order advocate, will be good for the European Union. Sarkozy is an unabashed EU opportunist, whose campaign style does not differ from that of Silvio Berlusconi (...)."

McCaw